

Bill Number: Oversight

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Witness:

Col. Kim Summers

Garrison Commander

Fort Campbell, TN

Testimony:

Senator Alexander, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you and the committee for allowing me to speak to these critical issues. As the Garrison Commander of Fort Campbell for the past two years, I have observed many facets of these questions and hope to provide an informative perspective.

Fort Campbell is the home to some 24,916 soldiers and supports 14,700 Reserve and National Guard soldiers, 46,177 family members, and over 124,000 retirees. The installation encompasses 105,000 acres and borders two states and four counties. Our association and relationship with the local communities is top notch. In my 25 years of service, I have seen none better. As a result of this extraordinary relationship and these communities' genuine care for soldiers, our community support structure is second to none. An example is the joint commitment of both the Christian County and Montgomery County school systems who teamed up with our own on-post schools in adopting the Secondary Education Transfer Study program more than a year ago. This program has made it much simpler and smoother for high school students of military families to transfer between duty assignments and associated schools without disadvantaging the student academically.

In order for our soldiers to properly prepare for missions when our nation calls, we as an installation offer a variety of family support services to our soldiers and families. This support allows the military member to train to the highest standard. As part of that readiness preparation, the Garrison of Fort Campbell, as well as the entire chain of command of our Army, know the importance and relationship family readiness plays in each soldier's ability to accomplish the mission. As with our community support programs, our family readiness operations are world class due to the support we receive from Congress, the Army, and our own work force. Our programs include such services as Family Readiness Center, Volunteer Coordinator, School Liaison, Child and Youth Services, Family Assistance Center, Army Emergency Relief, Chaplains Helping Hand, to name but a few. The Family Readiness Group (FRG) system is a key element in the support of families. This organization provides the link between family requirements and the Chain of Command. That Chain of Command, better known as the Rear Detachment, is staffed with dedicated leaders at every level. The Rear Detachment structure and its high quality soldiers illustrate the steadfast dedication to excellence our deployed commanders place on insuring our families are properly cared for.

Another vital program in supporting family readiness is providing child care services. Our continued expansion of child care opportunities is a daily challenge during times of deployment. Respite care is at a premium. With the increased demands of single parenting as a result of the deployment, it is evident that this is an area of increasing need. Availability of child care services, from hourly to 24 hour service, is ripe for enhancement.

It is not enough to bring services and make facilities available to our families. We must also provide a means to assist in educating our families, spouses, and soldiers. A key tool is the Army Family Team Building program. This program provides training to family members on military environment, financial readiness and goods and services available to them in order to function in the military structure. This program proves itself every day during deployments. Families and soldiers are better prepared as a result of this training. As we provide services and products to our families, none of this would work without a solid and regular communication process. Fort Campbell provides forums for our families and Rear Detachments to not only communicate with each other through family readiness group meetings, social settings and recreational opportunities, but through official channels as well. We hold a bi-weekly senior Family Readiness Group leader meeting. At this meeting are the primary representatives from the service areas and the Installation Chain of Command. Also attending are the Senior Spouses from the major units on post down to the Battalion level. These spouses/representatives provide the link for information flow back to families. Even though communicating official information is a command responsibility, this critical aspect of family support is an excellent way to insure maximum information distribution. The process of keeping the families informed of unit activities, surfacing issues in the family support arena, and providing a feedback loop is essential to sustaining current, accurate and timely information flow. Our Installation Rear Detachment Command and Staff meeting is a parallel effort that compliments our Bi-Weekly FRG. In this meeting, we focus on military business; but as previously stated, taking care of families is military business. As a result of these meetings and procedures, we have harnessed the collective intelligence in order to prioritize issues and redirect resources as needed. These meetings compliment our installation media and communication methods, like Fort Campbell Channel 9, Courier Post Newspaper, and local media venues.

But with all the successes and magnificent support from Congress, our communities, Army, and Post systems; we do have areas that need attention. The most prominent of these lies in the child care arena. Specifically, respite care availability and facilities. Due to deployments, families become single parent households instantly. Even though our systems and facilities are in place to support the family, we lack enough capability to handle short-term child care on a recurring basis. Before the deployment, both parents would work the schedule. During deployments, that flexibility is gone. The problem is magnified with special needs children. We have one parent doing the job of two is the bottom line. If we could enhance the availability of respite care resources, it would qualitatively and quantitatively improve our family support.

The second area needing attention is that of resources to facilitate improvement in our family support system. Dedicated facilities on Fort Campbell are at a premium, but dedicated family support facilities are necessary in order to provide a place for the myriad of family readiness/family support tasks to be accomplished. From FRG flyers to producing event calendars, having meeting space and providing child care are all requirements for successful programs. The Installation provides for these needs but not to the level we would expect for such an important part of soldier readiness. Unit areas are restrictive and often not available. Even though the installation provides space for our

FRG's, the competition to support units and other priorities is so intense that it makes sense to consider a new facility for family support.

Programs to leverage other sources of support are alive and well at Fort Campbell. An example of this is the support we receive from the Armed Forces YMCA. Donations from charities are wonderful and very generous but do not cover the requirements. Volunteers give back to our Installation literally millions of dollars in time each year, but we can do more. Dedicated full time support personnel in the family readiness business would be a tremendous sign of commitment and progress. Additionally, a family readiness facility certified for child care and having the ability to provide for the needs of our families and those that support them would be tremendous.

In conclusion, our support structure is critical in maintaining soldier readiness. I personally and professionally am very proud of what Fort Campbell does in that effort. Our surrounding communities have embraced our soldiers and families like none other. This teamwork and mutual support is proof we are progressing in this effort. Fort Campbell is a wonderful place to live, work and play. When our soldiers are called to duty in a distant land, with the continued help from all, Fort Campbell will rise to the occasion and insure our family readiness will be every bit as high as the readiness of our soldiers.